

VZCZCXYZ0000
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHRB #0308/01 0531657
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 221657Z FEB 06
FM AMEMBASSY RABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2866
INFO RUEHCL/AMCONSUL CASABLANCA PRIORITY 1270
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 3997
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 5347
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 2775
RUEHAS/AMEMBASSY ALGIERS 3732
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0445
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS RABAT 000308

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE, SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/MAG, NEA/PI

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KMPI](#) [KDEM](#) [MO](#)

SUBJECT: IRI POLL SHOWS VOTERS HAVE LITTLE FAITH IN
POLITICAL PARTIES, PREDICTS STRONG SHOWING BY PJD IN 2007

11. (U) This message is sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

12. (SBU) SUMMARY: A September 2005 poll of 1500 Moroccans administered by the International Republican Institute (IRI) under the auspices of its MEPI/USAID program found that Moroccans are disillusioned with their government and elected officials. The poll shows that a lack of jobs and low public confidence in the political system, especially in parliament and political parties, are the largest obstacles to increased participation of the electorate in the political process, despite respondents' considerable optimism about Morocco's future. The poll also found that of the 975 respondents judged to be likely voters in the 2007 parliamentary elections, 15 percent said they would vote for the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP), 13 percent Istiqlal, 10 percent the Islamist Party for Justice and Development (PJD), 7 percent the Popular Movement Union (UMP) parties, and 8 percent others. Of the 43 percent of respondents who were undecided, 83 percent said they would "lean" toward the PJD, 8 percent the National Rally of Independents (RNI), 6 percent USFP, and 2 percent Istiqlal. Adjusting the results to include the choices of these undecided respondents, the poll found that a hypothetical vote of likely voters would result in a strong victory for the PJD in parliamentary elections with 46 percent of the vote (but not necessarily 46 percent of parliament's 325 seats). The poll sets the baseline for two follow-on surveys that IRI will coordinate, assuming the continuation of funding beyond the close of project date of February 28, 12006. END SUMMARY.

13. (SBU) On January 18, 2006, IRI presented to the Ambassador, USAID Director, and mission officers its analysis of the first of three planned public opinion polls under a project funded by MEPI and administered by USAID's Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS). Working through a Moroccan polling firm, LMS-CSA Marketing & Sondages, IRI surveyed 1500 respondents in rural and urban areas in September 2005 to establish a baseline for assessing Moroccan attitudes on political reform and governing institutions and provide insight into the national voter bases of the country's leading political parties. (Note: Fifty-seven percent of participants came from urban areas. End Note.)

14. (SBU) LMS-CSA conducted face-to-face interviews with

each participant in 13 of Morocco's 16 regions (not including the Western Sahara). Interviews were conducted mostly in Arabic but occasionally in Amazigh (Berber), in participant homes. Respondents had no prior knowledge of the poll and LMS-CSA offered no incentives to participate. IRI began its second poll on January 21, 2005.

Optimistic about Future but Bearish on Government

¶5. (SBU) Despite showing considerable optimism about Morocco's future -- 75 percent of respondents said they were somewhat to very optimistic -- a majority of those surveyed (53 percent) believed the country needed to elect a new "government." (NB: Pollsters did not define the word government for respondents.) Of this majority, 63 percent were convinced that Morocco is headed in the "wrong direction" as compared to 48 percent for the entire sample.

Respondents' Chief Concern: Jobs and Unemployment

¶6. (SBU) The survey indicates that respondents' frustration with government stems from perceptions that people in government are "against change," that today's government is just as "ineffective and undemocratic" as past governments, and that the government "lacks qualified and efficient leaders." IRI observes that the public's dissatisfaction with elected representatives appears to be strongly correlated with the pre-eminence that jobs play in the daily lives of Moroccans. Out of a list that included education, housing, illiteracy, health services, terrorism, social justice, economy, and protection of rights and liberties, 74 percent of all respondents identified jobs and unemployment as their top worry.

¶7. (SBU) Poverty and standard of living (37 and 27 percent, respectively) were the only other choices that garnered more than 25 percent of the responses. The results suggest that as long as the government fails to meet voters' expectations on jobs, perceptions of government are likely to remain unfavorable. The findings also support the view, according to IRI, that in order to be more effective, parties must couch their messages to voters in more concrete terms like jobs rather than in abstract concepts like social justice or the economy.

Negative Views of Political Parties and Parliament

¶8. (SBU) The survey shows that the public has strong, negative perceptions of political parties and parliament. Respondents were asked to rate various institutions, countries, and political organizations on a scale of 0 to 10 with 10 indicating a very warm, favorable feeling. They gave parliament an average score of 3.71. The USFP and PJD were the only political parties that received an average score greater than 4. The PJD, however, was the sole party for which a higher percentage of people gave it a favorable rating (from 6 to 10) than those that rated it unfavorably. By comparison, respondents gave France an average rating of 7.86, the United States a 5.51, and Algeria a 2.47.

¶9. (SBU) The public's negative image of parties and parliament stems from a lack of confidence in politicians and the party system, according to the poll. Eighty-four percent of respondents said that parties are "only after their own interests," 79 percent believed that parties are "tarnished by bribes and corruption," and 73 percent agreed with the statement that parties are "out of touch with people like you." Only 22 percent believed that parties are made up of "people you can trust" and just 14 percent agreed that parties "understand the concerns of citizens."

¶10. (SBU) When asked which party -- the USFP, PJD, Istiqlal, or a non-existent party named the New Reform Party inserted by pollsters as an alternative choice for

respondents -- provides strong leadership, keeps its promises, and is "on your side," a range of 17-19 percent chose the phantom New Reform Party as compared to just 9-11 percent for the PJD; 8-9 percent for USFP; and 6-8 percent for Istiqlal. Twenty-six to twenty-nine percent of respondents chose neither party. According to IRI, a voter's assessment of a party's performance on these three principles usually correlates strongly with predicting their vote.

Voters Unable to Differentiate Among Parties

¶11. (SBU) The poll found that Morocco's parties are virtually indistinguishable to voters. Pollsters asked respondents to state which of four parties -- USFP, PJD, Istiqlal, or the New Reform Party -- would do the "best job" on employment, education reform, fighting poverty and illiteracy, improving infrastructure and health services, and developing rural areas. Respondents' gave responses ranging from 8-11 percent for the USFP and PJD, and 7-9 percent for Istiqlal, while scores for the non-existent New Reform Party hovered around 20 percent. These low scores not only reflect voters' lack of faith in Morocco's leading parties, but they also show that Moroccans make few distinctions across parties on issues.

¶12. (SBU) Lending further support to this finding, 68 percent of respondents said they disagreed with the statement that it is "easy to understand the differences between the programs of different political parties." IRI points to these results as indicators that parties are not talking about issues in terms that are understood by and familiar to the voter. Parties' ideas are too broad, IRI believes, and, consequently, voters are not able to make distinctions across parties.

Still Hope for Parties

¶13. (SBU) Notwithstanding respondents' critical views of party life in Morocco, the poll suggests there may be an opening for parties to improve their image. In an open-ended question, pollsters asked respondents what the single most important thing a party could do to regain its credibility; 25 percent said parties could "follow through on promises made" while 24 percent believed parties could "fight unemployment." In a related question, 64 percent of respondents said they agreed with the statement that they would have more faith in the system if political parties passed internal reforms. Seventy-eight percent believed parties should hold "regular elections to choose their leadership" and 86 percent said parties "need to be more financially transparent." (Note: The government's new law on political parties, passed by parliament in December 2005, requires parties to improve internal democracy and increase financial transparency. End Note.)

Limited Political Engagement

¶14. (SBU) The poll found that few respondents defined themselves as active participants in the political system. Just 1 percent said they were party "activists" and only 14 percent said they "sympathized" with a particular party. (Note: By contrast, 60-70 percent of American voters identify with either the Democratic or Republican party, according to IRI. End Note.) Of these two groups (activists and sympathizers), 30 percent identified most with the PJD, 25 percent with USFP, 23 percent with Istiqlal, and 8 percent with the rural, Berber-based UMP. The remaining respondents split their loyalty among centrist RNI (4 percent), oppositionist Constitutional Union (UC) (4 percent), leftist Party for Progress and Socialism (PPS) (3 percent), and others (3 percent).

¶15. (SBU) These self-described activists and sympathizers indicated that a party's ideas (37 percent), history (21

percent), and leaders (20 percent) were the factors that most attracted them to the party. Of the 83 percent of respondents that said they were neither an activist nor a sympathizer and the 2 percent who refused to answer, 69 percent said they are not involved in party life because they are "not interested in politics;" an additional 20 percent said they did "not trust any [political party]."

Candidate's Personality, Campaign Promises Draw Voters

¶16. (SBU) The poll corroborates the widely accepted notion that Moroccans are mostly drawn to a candidate's personality and campaign promises when casting their vote. For the 60 percent of respondents who claimed they voted in the 2002 elections, 43 percent said that the "personal traits" of a candidate led to their choice of one party over another while 27 percent said a candidate's "campaign promises" drew them in. Seventeen percent cited a party's platform or campaign issues as the main factor.

Higher Voter Participation Likely for 2007

¶17. (SBU) If parliamentary elections were held tomorrow, 65 percent of respondents said that it was "very likely" (53 percent) or "probable" (12 percent) that they would vote. (Note: This would mark a significant rise in the rate of voter participation over the 2002 legislative elections, which barely reached 50 percent. End Note.) When pollsters asked this subset of likely voters which party they would vote for, 43 percent said they were undecided; 15 percent chose USFP; 13 percent Istiqlal; 10 percent PJD; 7 percent UMP; 4 percent the New Reform Party; 2 percent RNI; 1 percent PPS; and 1 percent UC. By comparison, USFP (50 seats) and Istiqlal (48 seats) won 15 percent of the lower house's 325 seats in 2002, while PJD (42 seats) and RNI (41 seats) won 13 percent. The three Berber-based parties, which ran individually in 2002, garnered 17 percent, or a total of 55 seats.

PJD Takes the "Lean" Vote

¶18. (SBU) When pressed by pollsters, 83 percent of the 43 percent of respondents who were undecided said that if they had to decide on a party right now, they would "lean" toward the PJD. The remaining respondents said they would lean toward voting RNI (8 percent), USFP (6 percent), or Istiqlal (2 percent). Adjusting the results to include the choices of these undecided respondents, the poll found that a hypothetical vote of likely voters would result in a strong victory for the PJD in parliamentary elections with 46 percent of the vote. USFP would finish in a distant second with 17 percent, Istiqlal third at 14 percent, RNI fourth at 6 percent, UMP fifth at 4 percent, the New Reform Party sixth at 3 percent, and PPS and UC tied for seventh at 1 percent. IRI pointed out that since 57 percent of respondents were from urban areas, where there are fewer parliamentary seats available per capita, the PJD's hypothetical victory of 46 percent of the vote would be unlikely to deliver 46 percent of seats.

IRI Presents Data to Party Leaders

¶19. (SBU) IRI briefed the results of the poll to the top leadership of the USFP, Istiqlal, PJD, UMP, RNI, and PPS to sensitize them to the critical need for internal reform and constituent outreach in their parties. Based on the poll's findings, IRI will conduct training sessions for party activists working in communications and outreach in order to assist parties in developing contemporary communication and recruitment techniques. During the briefing with the PJD, general secretariat member Lahcen Daoudi confided that the party was "concerned" about the 83 percent "lean" vote of currently undecided voters for the party. IRI interpreted this to mean that the PJD fears that rapid growth of the

party may risk unsettling the palace.

Comment

¶20. (SBU) The IRI poll gives us an excellent baseline for assessing and comparing Moroccan views and attitudes on politics in the lead up to parliamentary elections in 2007. It substantiates the widely held view that political parties and parliament suffer from a large credibility gap with the public and validates the idea that Morocco's party system continues to be more responsive to and driven by personalities rather than issues. The respondents' placing of a candidate's personal traits and campaign promises above the platform/issues of the candidate's party on the rank-ordered list of key factors determining their vote adds further weight to these notions; it also suggests that parties are not reaching out actively to the population on issues outside the election cycle.

¶21. (SBU) COMMENT CONT: The PJD's strong victory in the hypothetical vote underscores the party's popularity and name recognition at the grassroots, and especially in urban areas; it may also reflect dividends earned as the most recognizable member of Morocco's opposition. It does not necessarily hand the PJD the 2007 elections, however. Although the poll bears out the party's higher popularity over rivals, the fact that respondents gave it scores on key issues that were only moderately higher than the USFP and Istiqlal means that even the PJD has a lot of work to do to restore public confidence in the party system and elected representatives. END COMMENT.

RILEY